



Afghanistan enlists experts from SRK Consulting, Mayer Brown and Heenan Blaikie to establish transparent tender process for its mineral assets.

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TORONTO — Afghanistan Minister of Mines Wahidullah Shahrani today announced internationally-renowned experts from SRK Consulting, Mayer Brown, and Heenan Blaikie would lead the Ministry's continuing efforts to expedite international investment in the country's mineral sector.

SRK Consulting technical advisors, led by Dr. Neal Rigby, and Mayer Brown legal advisors, led by partner Ian Coles, will design and execute a transparent tender process on behalf of the Ministry of Mines to help the country realize the economic benefits of its substantial mineral assets. Heenan Blaikie partner Steve Vaughan will assist with strategic direction.

"The Ministry's recently launched reform program, combined with the involvement of these world class advisors, will ensure that each tender application is handled in a fair and transparent manner. Bringing this caliber of international expertise to bear for the Ministry will build the confidence of global investors in Afghanistan's untapped mineral resources," said Minister Shahrani. "That international investor confidence is key to sustainable economic growth in our country."

The team will draw upon years of painstaking work to document and map Afghanistan's mineral wealth by the Afghanistan Geological Service, the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Defense Department's Task Force for Business and Stability Operations.

Over the past year, Task Force geologists, in conjunction with USGS and AGS, portioned Afghanistan's vast mineral wealth into 24 areas of interest based on security, scale, market value, infrastructure needs and availability, and time to impact.

These areas of interest are all potential mining districts with one or more mineral deposits, both metallic and industrial, that could contribute to building a broad based mining industry in Afghanistan. The recent sampling work and remote sensing completed in Afghanistan has created, arguably, the most extensive mineral dataset ever compiled for a single country. At a time of growing concern over a global resource deficit, Afghanistan will become a major new source of minerals, precious metals and rare earth elements.

SRK Consulting, Mayer Brown, and Heenan Blaikie are some of the world's leading mining experts. SRK's Rigby has 36 years experience in the international mining industry, having served as Chairman of the SRK Global Group for 15 years, and more recently as a corporate mining consultant and the firm's principal mining engineer. Dr. Rigby has performed mining engineering, project management and management consulting for a wide range of metalliferous, coal, diamond and industrial mineral projects in more than 50 countries worldwide. The major focus of his consulting work for the past 20 years has been providing due diligence to shareholders, stock exchanges and financial institutions of the "bankability" or fundamental value, risks and opportunities of hundreds of different mining projects.

The Mayer Brown team will be led by Coles, who heads the firm's global mining and minerals practice. Coles is widely considered as one of the industry's top mining project finance attorneys and has extensive experience advising banks, companies and governments on mining and mineral related legal matters. Coles has worked on mining projects in almost 50 countries across the globe, including the first producing mine in Eritrea, the Voshkod Chrome project in Kazakhstan, and the Kupol gold and silver mines in Russia. He has also been involved in the negotiation of government-sponsored mining agreements in Asia, Africa and elsewhere around the world.

Heenan Blaikie partner Steve Vaughan will assist with strategic direction. Vaughan is a legend in the Canadian mining world, where he has practiced law for more than four decades. He has advised and represented Canadian and international companies, served on governmental advisory committees and has been involved in natural resources transactions in more than 65 countries. Vaughan has also written numerous publications on natural resource financing, mining, international due diligence and related securities law issues published by The Canadian Institute, The Law Society of Upper Canada, the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada, Insight, the Conference Board of Canada and the Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation.

The team is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Defense's Task Force for Business and Stability Operations. "The sheer volume of minerals, precious metals and rare earth elements that lie beneath the Earth's surface in Afghanistan represent a powerful potential economic engine. The responsible development of this mineral wealth can make Afghanistan economically self-sufficient and create thousands of local jobs," said Deputy Under Secretary Paul A. Brinkley, who directs the Task Force. "We know this experienced team will play a large role in creating a transparent tender process that will help the country realize its potential."

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About SRK Consulting

SRK Consulting is an independent, international consulting practice that offers mining sector clients services from exploration through feasibility, mine planning, and production to mine closure. Formed in 1974, SRK now employs more than 1,000 professionals internationally in 43 permanent offices on 6 continents. SRK Consulting employs leading specialists in each field of science and engineering. Its seamless integration of services, and global base, has made the company a leading international practice in due diligence, feasibility studies and confidential internal reviews. Among SRK's 1,500 clients are most of the world's major and medium-sized metal and industrial mineral mining houses, exploration companies, banks, petroleum exploration companies, construction firms and government departments.

About Mayer Brown

Mayer Brown is a leading international law firm with 1,600 lawyers across Europe, the Americas and Asia. The mining industry is a core business area for Mayer Brown. Decades of advising the sector have given Mayer Brown an in-depth understanding of the industry's unique characteristics. The lawyers in its global mining practice have extensive experience of the day-to-day legal, financial and operational issues faced by mineral producers, governments, and those who provide finance to the industry. The global mining team is recognized in the leading independent legal directories and the firm's lawyers have been involved in many projects that have been named "Deal of the Year."